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Viewing cable 08SANJOSE710, C/NF) C-NE8-00834: ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH COSTA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SANJOSE710	2008-09-03 17:44	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy San Jose

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-12/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2711772.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2707705.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2707712.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2707716.aspx>

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PP RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGA RUEHGD RUEHHA RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHMT RUEHNG
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031744Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0064
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0050
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SAN JOSE 000710

NOFORN
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, NEA/IPA AND INR/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [XF](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: (C/NF) C-NE8-00834: ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH COSTA
RICA: BUSINESSLIKE, BUT SOME POLITICAL IRRITANTS

REF: A. STATE 64659

[1](#)B. 06 SAN JOSE 1841 (ALL NOTAL)

[1](#)C. 06 SAN JOSE 2263

[1](#)D. SAN JOSE 129

[1](#)E. 07 SAN JOSE 1106

[1](#)F. SAN JOSE 629

[1](#)G. SAN JOSE 636

Classified By: DCM Peter M. Brennan for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Despite some concerns and irritants voiced both publicly and privately to us by the Israeli Ambassador to Costa Rica, the overall relationship between Costa Rica and Israel is relatively calm and businesslike. While not as dynamic as Costa Rica's commercial relationship with the U.S., the majority of Israeli-Costa Rican contact is economically-oriented. Political relations, however, have suffered recently due to shifts in Costa Rican policy towards the Middle East, such as the recognition of Palestinian "statehood," the establishment of diplomatic relations with some Arab nations, possible Costa Rican support for Israel to engage in dialogue with Hamas, and the move of the Costa Rican Embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in August 2006. Most local contacts, and we agree, believe that these moves were partially designed to help Costa Rica win its bid for a seat on the UNSC 2008-2009. Costa Rica supports a peaceful and two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian question.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Security cooperation or assistance between Israel and Costa Rica is nearly non-existent, the only concrete examples being normal law enforcement cooperation, such as extraditions, and infrequent and small-scale police training.
END SUMMARY.

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POLITICAL RELATIONS

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[1](#)3. (C) THE EXODUS FROM JERUSALEM DEFINES RELATIONS - The GOCR's unexpected August 2006 announcement that it would move its embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv (Ref B) has colored Israeli-Costa Rican relations throughout the Arias Administration. The GOCR's official explanation was that it was righting itself with UNSC Resolution 478 and looking to increase opportunities for foreign direct investment from the Middle East. In a 2002 "La Nacion" newspaper article, then ex-President Oscar Arias recommended moving the Costa Rican Embassy to Tel Aviv, calling its location in Jerusalem an "injustice for the Palestinians." Addressing that "injustice" was one of his first foreign policy moves after returning to office. The motivation, however, was shaped more by his administration's determination to assume a non-permanent seat on the UNSC, than to effect an equitable Israeli/Palestinian solution. (NOTE: Costa Rica was elected from the GRULAC Group in October 2007 for the 2008-2009 term. END NOTE)

[1](#)4. (C) Arias viewed the Security Council as key to advancing his global objectives on conventional arms reductions, environmental protection and foreign assistance for "responsible" international actors such as Costa Rica. FonMin Bruno Stagno (who in 2006 had just left his post as the GOCR's UN Ambassador) made it clear, telling "La Nacion" on August 16, 2006 that "putting Costa Rica in harmony" with UNSC resolutions was the reason for the embassy move.

[1](#)5. (SBU) INCREASED ARAB TIES - The embassy move to Tel Aviv yielded diplomatic results. Costa Rica restored relations with Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen (Ref C) in 2006. Then, on February 5 of this year, the MFA announced that Costa Rica and the "State" of Palestine had agreed to establish diplomatic relations and would exchange ambassadors at some

future date (Ref D). According to Stagno, the Palestinian decision showed the GOCR's "gradual normalization of diplomatic relations with the Arab and Islamic world in general, as part of a foreign policy of opening borders and minds, which reinforces an intelligent engagement of Costa Rica in the World (unofficial translation)."

¶6. (SBU) The MFA announcement further noted that of the 15 nations with which Costa Rica established full diplomatic

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¶7. (C) ISRAELIS IRRITATED BUT NOT TENSE - As a result of GOCR support for the "State" of Palestine and deepening Arab ties, in-country Israeli diplomats have been concerned about relations between Israel and Costa Rica. Ehud Eitam, Israel's Ambassador to Costa Rica, told us on August 20 that Costa Rica's relationship with Israel could be better in light of the Embassy move and increased Arab-Costa Rican ties. However, he did not dwell on the issue and seemed to be more curious about what Costa Rica's next no-notice international move would be. This is in some contrast to Eitam's initial reactions in June to Costa Rica's alleged call in the UN for Israeli dialogue with Hamas (see paras 7-10 below).

¶8. (U) NEW POLICIES ANGER SOME DOMESTIC POLITICAL ELITE - The Arias Administration's Middle Eastern policies have generated some criticism from the country's political elite. In a May 20 Op-Ed in the daily "Diario Extra," former President Luis Alberto Monge criticized the Middle Eastern policies of President Arias and his brother Rodrigo (who is also Minister of the Presidency) as being "neo-Nazi." Monge, whose ex-wife is Jewish, has traditionally been a firm supporter of Israel and critical of any overt support of the Palestinians or perceived "anti-Israeli" actions. In the Op-Ed, Monge charged that the Arias brothers' "regime," with support from "La Nacion," established diplomatic relations with a non-existent Palestinian State. Monge compared the Arias Administration to those of Castro's Cuba, Chavez's Venezuela and Ortega's Nicaragua, who also have recognized the "State" of Palestine. Monge's comments had no impact on the government, however.

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GOCR CALLS FOR DIALOGUE WITH HAMAS?

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¶9. (SBU) In early June, Israeli Ambassador Eitam shared his concerns with us regarding a June 4 MFA press release that denied statements by the GOCR UN Ambassador calling for Israeli dialogue with Hamas. The press statement was prompted by remarks made in the National Assembly on June 2-3 by legislator Jose Manuel Echandi (Independent) with information provided to him by the Israeli Embassy in Costa Rica. Echandi criticized the GOCR's UN Ambassador Jorge Urbina for asking Israel to converse with Hamas during a UNSC session. For text of Echandi's remarks, see: <http://www.aseamblea.go.cr/actas/2006-2010>.

¶10. (C) At the time, Eitam seemed deeply concerned about Costa Rica's overtures to Hamas. He told us that MFA denials notwithstanding, Urbina had indeed made statements urging dialogue with Hamas and claimed that the MFA was trying to backtrack and cover this up. (MFA contacts, including in the Minister's office, later insisted to us that Urbina's comments had been misconstrued by some Jewish Costa Ricans.) Eitam went on to allege that Stagno's Israeli National Day speech, as quoted in the June 4 MFA press release, was modified to further justify the Arias administration's position of recognizing the "State" of Palestine (see Ref B for more of Eitam's then reaction to the recognition). Eitam recommended that we keep an eye on this dynamic both in San Jose and in the UN. (NOTE: The MFA press statement quoted President Bush and Vice President Cheney on the importance of a two-state solution, apparently to justify the GOCR's position. END NOTE)

¶11. (U) In the June 4 press release (full text at <http://www.ree.go.cr>) the MFA denied that Urbina suggested dialogue between Israel and Hamas. The statement expressed Costa Rica's hopes for peace; advocated a dialogue of peace between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas; blamed Arab countries for frustrating the development of a Palestinian state; and laid out reasons for Costa Rica's recognition of Palestine. The MFA called the

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Israeli/Palestinian conflict an asymmetrical one which required asymmetrical concessions, and said that it was time for both parties to accept that peace had a price and would require painful, uncomfortable sacrifices.

¶12. (U) The MFA press release went on to say that the current leaders of the Palestinian National Authority "deserve our support, although we do not necessarily share all their views" because those leaders were the only viable alternative to a terrorist-controlled government. The MFA called Costa Rica a "torch bearer" for Israel's right to exist in peace and urged an end to black-and-white thinking on the Israeli/Palestinian issue.

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ECONOMIC RELATIONS

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¶13. (SBU) Economic relations between Costa Rica and Israel are positive but relatively small. We do not expect, for example, a Free Trade Agreement anytime soon. Israel primarily exports high tech material to Costa Rica in the form of communications equipment. Costa Rica, on the other hand, mainly exports coffee to Israel. Ambassador Eitam told us the trade relationship was "not huge" but highlighted that both countries had Intel plants producing microchips, resulting in some bilateral cooperation.

¶14. (SBU) With the prospective opening of the Costa Rican telecommunications field under CAFTA, Eitam said Israel was eager to get even further into the Tico market. One Israeli firm, ECI Telecom, is already present and recently won a new contract from Racsa (Costa Rica's national internet service) to offer Costa Rican customers super-bandwidth for their internet connections. ECI Telecom also has a contract, though somewhat delayed, to install a country-wide fiber-optic network for Racsa.

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SECURITY ASSISTANCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION

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¶15. (C) The security relationship between Costa Rica and Israel is practically non-existent. Eitam told us that Israel had made some arms transfers to the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), approximately 15-20 years ago. (NOTE: Post has seen some MPS units outfitted with older Uzis and Galil-type rifles, but most are in poor condition. END NOTE). Eitam said that Israel had no plans to ship any weapons to Costa Rica and added that they are not interested in making security donations, including non-lethal aid, to the GOCR.

¶16. (SBU) Israel and Costa Rica do cooperate on standard law enforcement issues, such as extraditions and police training. Eitam said that Israel had a regional police attache in Bogota who visited Costa Rica occasionally. He added that this attache had helped train President Arias' bodyguards in the past. Eitam mentioned that Israel had provided some community policing courses for Costa Rica, but usually for not more than one to two officers per year. He mentioned that he had discussed the possibility of further security and law enforcement cooperation with former Minister of Public Security Fernando Berrocal and with Vice President Laura Chinchilla, but they had not followed up and Eitam did not

push it.

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GOCR AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

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¶17. (SBU) The Arias Administration has a friendly relationship with its affluent Costa Rican Jewish community, mainly located in the San Jose area. In April, we visited the Jewish Orthodox synagogue in San Jose and spoke with Salomon Aizenman, prominent restaurant franchise operator and President of the Jewish Zionist Center of Costa Rica. Aizenman told us that 2500 Orthodox and 300 Reform Jews made up the local Jewish community. When asked to whom he would turn if the Jewish community experienced discrimination or needed support from the government, Aizenman said that he

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would call President Arias directly.

¶18. (SBU) He characterized GOCR relations with the Jewish community as excellent and emphasized that the Jewish community in Costa Rica was, after all, Costa Rican. He pointed to two recent examples of GOCR support. First, after a worldwide Hezbollah threat against Jews at the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Public Security stationed Fuerza Publica police officers at the entrance to the synagogue for more than four months. Second, when a synagogue member saw anti-Semitic graffiti on a road sign, the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation immediately authorized its removal.

¶19. (U) On June 18, Channel 7 news featured the opening of the Costa Rican-Israeli Cultural Institute. The opening ceremony paid homage to ex-President Monge, who was in attendance. Speaking for the Jewish community, Aizenman expressed that the opening of the center would strengthen already close relations between the people of Costa Rica and Israel.

Apart from the Jewish community in San Jose, a very small community of Israelis settled in the last few years in the Malpais tourist area on the Pacific Coast.

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COMMENT

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¶20. (C) Although noteworthy, especially since Costa Rica will remain on the UNSC until December 31, 2009, we do not see minor irritants in Costa Rican-Israeli relations effecting USG interests in the region. We focus more closely, as the Israeli Ambassador mentioned, on the direction of Costa Rica's foreign policy and its next "surprise" international move (especially in regards to Cuba and Costa Rica's imminent membership in Petrocaribe (Ref G)). Although there is no particular Costa Rican cooperation with Israel to limit the influence of Iran in the region, we do not detect any sympathy for Iran on the part of Costa Rica nor any expansion or opening of relations. To the GOCR (as to most other governments in Central America), Iran has no natural ties to the region. The Arias Administration is concerned, however, about Iran and non-proliferation, and is active on these issues in New York.

CIANCHETTE